

THE VOICE OF FASHION

# WRITTEN IN STONE

HOW JEWELLERY WEARS US

In conversation with

**WENDY  
DONIGER**

ON THE RING OF TRUTH

2  
ANNIVERSARY  
SPECIAL

**MEN AND  
JEWELLERY**

RAJIV PUROHIT

**JOHNNY  
DEPP'S**  
TRINKETS &  
TATTOOS

**SABYASACHI  
MUKHERJEE**  
FIRST GENERATION  
JEWELLER

Secrets of the  
**DIAMOND  
RING**

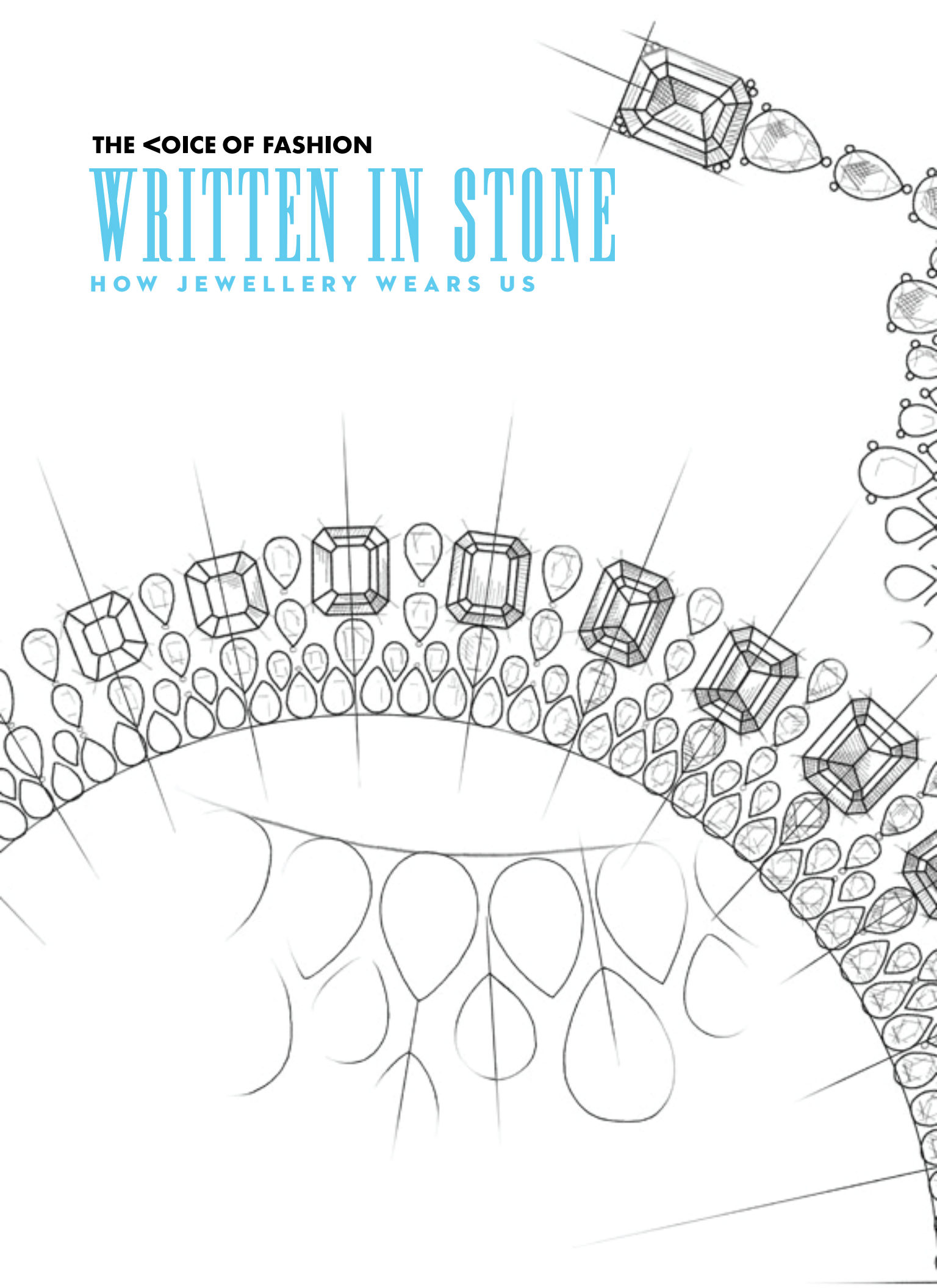
**TANJORE  
PAINTINGS**  
GOLDEN ERA

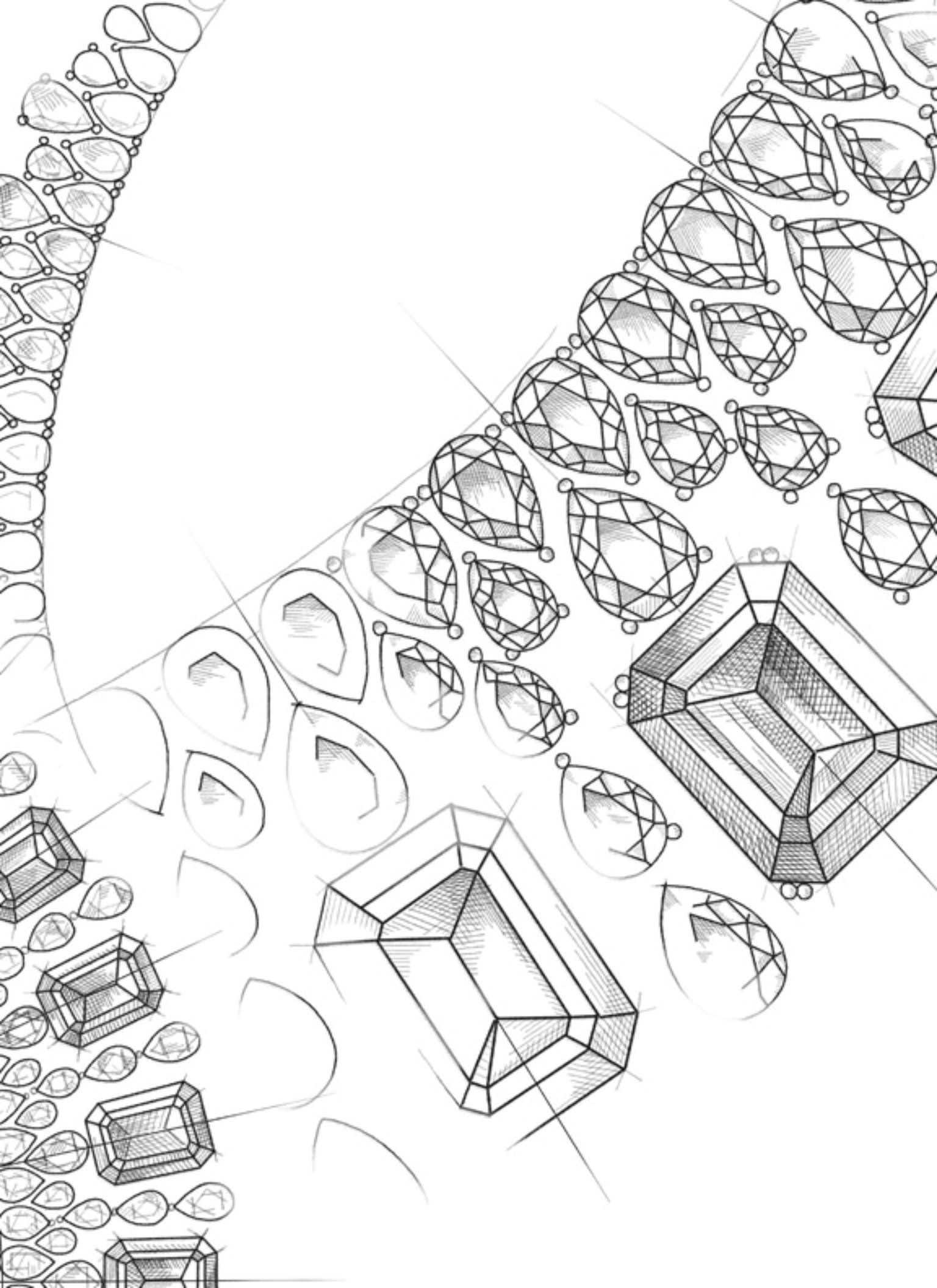


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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# Written in Stone

## How Jewellery Wears Us

*A favourite trinket, a ring with a love (or lust) story, an auspicious gem that weaves fate. In history and fairy tales, vaults, museums and memories, jewellery lives on*

The second anniversary edition of *The Voice of Fashion* is the result of a gradation of ideas that matter now and can last long. Reflections on a central idea for an anniversary edition that brought celebratory spark and symbolism, or even token value (like a piece of jewellery gifted by one person to another to mark a special day) led us towards jewellery.

The facets a jewellery edition offers are multitudinous. Fascination for the beauty of hand-crafted, heritage jewellery; its longevity as a possession through generations, its value (notional or real) through trials and triumphs, the memories associated with it, the potential it offers for artistic and design experimentation. Few stories after all compete for rapt attention with those around the Koh-i-Noor diamond or the blinding splendour of the jewels of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Of the Egyptian queen Cleopatra's gemstones or actor Elizabeth Taylor's 68-carat Cartier diamond given to her in 1969 by her lover and two-time husband Richard Burton that went on to being called the Taylor-Burton diamond.

Quite tellingly, the price of gold mirrors the health of global and local economies. If precious gems are a denominator of class, wealth, power, status that continue to churn ideas of "royalty" and the incomputable wealth of ancient kings and queens, it is also a dark reminder of current social and human injustices. Blood diamonds sit on one side of that spectrum; on the other are millions of households without a single piece of valuable jewellery, indicating the inequality of the society we live in.

One road from the umpteen narratives around jewellery leads us to the now— incarcerated scamster, diamond merchant Nirav Modi and why his fraud mirrors the failure of safeguards in law, banking, PR, publicity and fashion's hero-making tendencies. The other leads us to ordinary, breakable glass bangles. A set of two, four or six paired with versions of community or caste-specific jewellery seen on working class women. Glass bangles or some form of necklace "chains"—auspicious temple threads dipped in turmeric or strings of black beads with pendants in imitation materials to suggest marital status are worn even in the poorest of households by women who live out their roles authored primarily by gender. As daughter, even when she is son-like daughter, steely pillar of family strength as mother, wife, grandmother, bricklayer, farmer, tea picker, domestic help.

As the pandemic drags on with no end in sight, *Written in Stone: How Jewellery Wears Us* explores lasting value through gems and trinkets, social and familial ideas, and the business of gold as representative of economy. Bangles may break or diamond rings may spell 'foreverness' but for the spectator, aspirant, wearer, museum collector, anthropologist, trader or artist, jewellery will persist.

Hope you take a shine to *Written in Stone*.



Shefalee Vasudev



Designs by Tiffany & Co's jewellery artist Donald Claflin (L-R): sapphire ring with colourless and yellow diamonds; amethyst brooch with diamonds and emeralds; yellow beryl brooch with diamonds; sapphire ring with colourless and yellow diamonds; green tourmaline brooch with emeralds; colourless and yellow diamonds; sapphire ring with emeralds and diamonds.

# “IT IS OFTEN IMPOSSIBLE TO SEPARATE THE HARD AND SOFT VALUES OF JEWELLERY”

*Famed Sanskrit scholar and author Wendy Doniger on the persistent myths of jewellery in modern India and how emotions around jewels change with time*

BY SHEFALEE VASUDEV



American Indologist and scholar Wendy Doniger’s tenacious and riveting writings on ascetism and eroticism, Hindu mythology and religious thought, have been sagacious guides to many keen on scrutiny and reflection on the idea of India.

*The Ring of Truth* stokes cross cultural and historical curiosity. From Art Nouveau jewellery, traditions in medieval Europe, Victorian jewels, rings given by kings to queens, Lord Ram’s signet ring carried by Hanuman to Sita imprisoned in Ravana’s Lanka in Valmiki’s *Ramayan*, it strings a universe. Doniger uses the persistence of circular jewellery—rings, bracelets, necklaces, anklets—to speak of human frailty, folly, fixation and sexual fervour, of wives and mistresses, kingdoms and clans thus laying bare entire existences.

‘Are Diamonds a Woman’s Best Friend?’ is among the most enjoyable sections of the book. Doniger exposes the clever campaigns of De Beers diamonds and how the myth that a diamond ring stands for love and commitment is first and foremost just that—a myth.

Doniger’s own love for jewels especially rings shines through. Her incisive arguments make this a supple, feminist conversation as she argues how “jewellery still stands for all the things that feminism abhors—that men pay women for sex, that beauty is the most important quality a woman has and so forth...”

*Edited excerpts.*

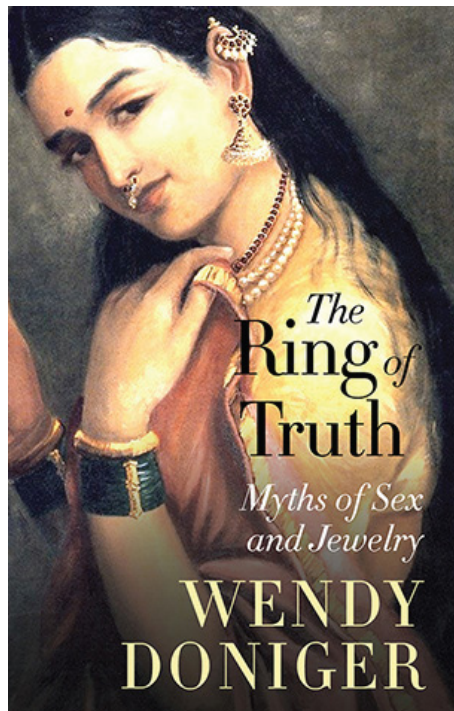
**SV: Jewellery in India historically signified class. New classes emerged though in post-Independence India. The Trophy Wives, the Kitty Party Gangs, The New Intellectuals, The Causeratti, Ikat wearing *jholawallas*, vintage collectors, Fabindia customers, writers, journalists...Now there is a Fashion Left in jewellery—young girls wearing “statement” jewellery. Do you sense a new, class hierarchy through jewellery?**

WD: I am more of a mythologist than a historian, which means that I am more interested in symbolic patterns that do not change than in the changes. But even I can see the ways in which jewellery simultaneously maintains its old values—for people continue to display their jewels, ostentatiously, for all of the old reason—and is used to make revolutionary statements. So some women in India, particularly those conscious of class and caste, continue to adorn themselves with as many carats as they can get, but younger women on the Fashion Left often wear no jewellery, or anti-jewellery of various sorts, spitting in the eyes of the rich women with their trophy jewellery. I think the issue is more one of income than of caste, but of course, the two are joined at the hip. The categories remain intact: jewellery still stands for all the things it has stood for over the centuries. Things that feminism abhors—that men pay women for sex, that beauty is the most important quality a woman has and so forth...culminate in what I have called the “slut assumption”—the belief that if a woman has a piece of expensive jewellery she got it by going to bed with some man. Even while feminists challenge those destructive, never entirely true and nowadays hardly ever true, but persistent attitudes to women, they persist.

**Jewellery exchange is still part of modern, urban marriages even when the bride and groom fix their alliance themselves and girls are highly**

**educated and financially independent. It crosses the feminism barrier. Why is that?**

Perhaps you underestimate the persistence of myth. Myths are stories that people remember and allow to influence them even when they *know* that these beliefs are neither true nor to their advantage. For many, many centuries, jewellery was the *only* source of wealth that a woman could have, the *only* hope of surviving if she left her husband, the *only* thing she

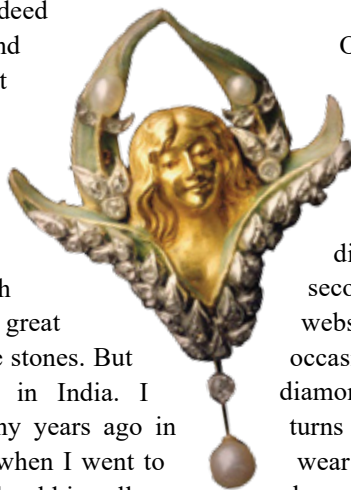


Left: A cover of *The Ring of Truth*, published by Speaking Tiger Books.  
Right: An Indian bride, dressed in traditional Indian jewellery. Photo: Shutterstock

could hope to pass on to her daughters. These years are not easily tossed away any more than all the caste strictures that were outlawed in the Indian Constitution in 1950 have succeeded in removing the caste injustices that persist in India today. It is, however, always good to have more just legislation, and new ideas about women's liberation are already having some effect in fighting against these old bad habits.

**In India, jewellery was largely about “buy back”, about financial investment and “trust”. Yet dozens of new designers sell it as luxury or art. In that light, how do you view contemporary jewellery trends in India?**

The idea of thumbing your nose at the financial value of jewellery by mixing “real” gems with artificial ones is one that we encounter from time to time in the 20th century, and it is interesting to see it emerging in India now, too. There have also been times when fake jewellery was valued over real jewellery precisely because one did not have to worry about it being stolen. The rise of costume jewellery does indeed suggest an evolution in taste and also plays a part in the feminist attempt to free women from the shackles of “real” jewellery. The workmanship of Benvenuto Cellini, or the fabulous Art Nouveau jewellery of the 19th and 20th centuries, has always added great value to the “naked” value of the stones. But this has not always been so in India. I remember being astonished many years ago in India [back in the early 1960s] when I went to buy a piece of intricately worked gold jewellery, and the jeweller would simply weigh it to determine its value. In America, I would have been charged a great deal more for the workmanship, and indeed, I chose the particular piece in question precisely because I admired the skilled workmanship.



Flora Pendant by Louis Aucoc  
(1850-1932).  
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

**In your work, did you find if the engagement ring became an object of disinterest, resentment, hurt or revenge once the marriage or relationship ended?**

Yes, there are many stories in which the ring of truth turns out to lie, and to become the symbol of betrayal rather than love. Often this produces a tension between the simple monetary value of the ring, which presumably remains intact, and the emotional value, which becomes negative. As Ophelia says to Hamlet when she returns the gifts he has given her, “Take these again, for to the noble mind, rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.” However, sometimes the jewellery does not “wax poor” even when the lover proves unkind. Elizabeth Taylor once remarked, after divorcing Richard Burton (for the second time), after he had given her a notoriously expensive diamond ring, “Well, at least I will have the ring.”

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### THE RISE OF COSTUME JEWELLERY DOES INDEED SUGGEST AN EVOLUTION IN TASTE AND ALSO PLAYS A PART IN THE FEMINIST ATTEMPT TO FREE WOMEN FROM THE SHACKLES OF “REAL” JEWELLERY

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On the other hand, there are also examples when the ring turns out to be a fake jewel but a token of real love, and remains valuable for that reason. In the film *Random Harvest*, Greer Garson cherishes the cheap blue beads from her husband who disappeared more than the valuable emerald her second husband gives her. Nowadays, there are websites about wonderful, often bitterly funny, occasionally illegal, things you can do with your diamond engagement ring when your boyfriend turns out to be a cad. In my own case, I kept and wear the ring my ex-husband had given me because it reminds me of the way I felt about him when he gave it to me at the beginning of the marriage, which I keep uppermost in my mind rather than the way I felt when we broke up. Also because it is a wonderful ring, with a rare, ancient Greek stone engraved with a figure of a centaur, and I have always loved horses. It is often impossible to separate the hard and soft values of a piece of jewellery.

**What is your most loved, fondest piece of jewellery?**

The piece of my own jewellery that I love best, that I look at every day and always wear when I go out, is one that I wrote about in my book. I value it because it reminds me of my parents, whom I loved very much (I wrote a book about them a couple of years ago, *The Donigers of Great Neck: A Mythologized Memoir*) and also because it is such a clever piece of jewellery, and so beautifully worked. It fits very comfortably on my hand, and does not snag even if I wear tight gloves. It is like wearing a whole world on my hand, the world of my youth, of my parents’ house with the books and paintings, of all the gentle customs that vanished so long ago from America, or perhaps from my youthful illusions of what America was. ■



# SABYASACHI

## FIRST JEWELLER OF INDIAN FASHION

*Couturier Sabyasachi Mukherjee is the rare Indian fashion designer who has cracked the complex code of establishing a successful fine jewellery brand*

BY SOHINI DEY

A model wearing bridal designs from the Heritage Jewellery collection.

**“T**here is so much to do with precious jewellery that I don’t think it’s possible to do it all in this lifetime,” says Sabyasachi Mukherjee. One of India’s most popular couturiers, Mukherjee launched Sabyasachi

Jewellery in 2017, extending his crafts-led maximalist aesthetic to the play of precious metals and gemstones. Since then, he has dressed hundreds of brides from Kovalam, Kerala to Montreux, Switzerland in his decadent baubles and this year, the brand found its way to American luxury retailer Bergdorf Goodman’s New York store with a collaboration that continues till September. Sabyasachi Jewellery may be the rare instance when an Indian fashion designer has cracked the complex code of establishing a successful jewellery business, with an extensive repertoire of designs and a clientele which includes Bollywood A-listers, entrepreneurs and influential fashion insiders.

Mukherjee’s jewellery, much like his couture, is luxurious and larger than life—defying the boundaries of traditional craft techniques with idiosyncratic shapes and interplay of material and colour. Handcrafted bridal chokers and bibs are carpeted with

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**VERY SOON JEWELLERY WILL BE SOLD  
LIKE ART; THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS  
THAT ALONG WITH PERCEIVED VALUE,  
THERE IS INTRINSIC VALUE  
IN JEWELLERY AS WELL**

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gemstones and fringed with gold drops; multi-strand pearl necklaces are anchored by statement pendants; colossal uncut diamonds are fearlessly paired with polished varieties in fancy, brilliant and mutual cuts. Rubies and emeralds share space on designs with unusual varieties like the green apple-hued chrysoprase, iridescent moonstones, spinels, cat eyes and fluorites, peridots and even crystals. Also part of the collections: face-framing *naths* (nose rings) and *maangtikas* which the brand takes credit for repopularising among Indian brides in recent years. Earlier this year, the brand launched the Royal Bengal Mangalsutra, priced at a relatively affordable ₹195,000.

In an interview with TVOF, the couturier speaks on his evolving jewellery collections, challenges of a generational industry, the importance of unique design

and inroads into affordable pricing.

*Edited excerpts:*

**How did you lay the foundation of a long-standing jewellery business?**

The foundation of a jewellery business cannot be laid overnight. Though people might look at Sabyasachi Jewellery as a recent development, the journey to its success started 20 years ago. My first foray into jewellery was costume jewellery that I used to make and sell in plastic tiffin boxes to hawkers on the streets of Calcutta. This first venture didn't last long. But I promised myself a second inning once I had a little bit of capital.

Over the past 20 years, I have had many jewellery collaborations, first with the World Gold Council and Tanishq, and the last, a signature line of diamond earrings, with Forevermark (a subsidiary of De Beers). From Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Guzaarish* to the catwalks of New York, a Middle Eastern royal family to Bergdorf Goodman, the jewellery brand has travelled a long way. If you have conviction and patience; the faith of your consumer; and craft and cultural capital; nothing is impossible.

**What are the challenges faced by independent jewellery labels in an industry dominated by family businesses?**

If one talks about nepotism, nowhere does it exist more than in the jewellery industry. It might be closely guarded, but the biggest myth about the success and the integrity of generational businesses is this—apart from sourcing, navigating a rather murky backend, there is no other advantage in these kinds of businesses. Just because the father or grandfather was a successful jeweller does not mean the new generation will be successful. In fact, just like how the Indian clothing industry was once dominated by clothing wholesalers till the apple cart was toppled by designers starting their own labels, I see the same disruption happening in the jewellery industry. There are enough courses worldwide that teach people sourcing and manufacturing. Design on the other hand is a different matter altogether. I believe that design

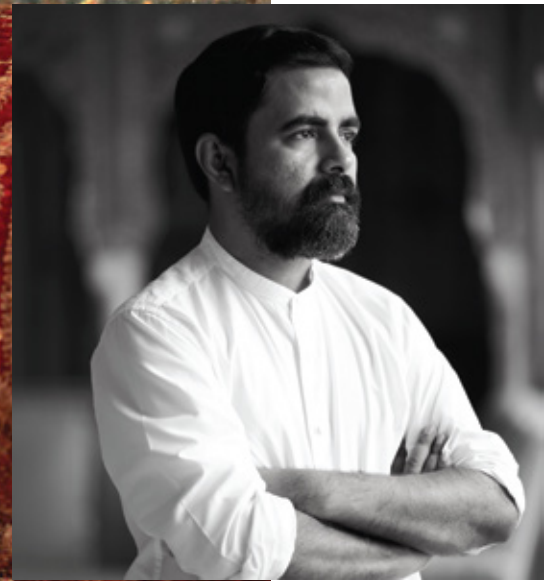


A model wearing the 'Fairlawn Necklace', part of the Sabyasachi Jewellery x Bergdorf Goodman collection.

cannot be taught. It can only be honed. The future of the Indian jewellery industry is going to be about professionally run businesses, with founders possessing a unique design edge.

**In India, jewellery is regarded as an investment and pricing can take precedence over design. How do you navigate that challenge?**

A big problem earlier on with the jewellery industry was that a lot of people used jewellery to hoard undeclared wealth. Because of this, resale value and buy back were the deal breakers in the purchase of jewellery. However in contemporary times, people have started to understand the merit of clean money, and jewellery is slowly moving from investment to consumption. However, while the price of jewellery is in part based on the precious material, the real value will now be added by the craftsmanship getting more and more rare. Very soon jewellery will be sold like art; the only difference is that along with perceived value, there is intrinsic value in jewellery as well. I believe that our brand has also become a big contributor to this change.



Couturier Sabyasachi Mukherjee launched his fine jewellery line in 2017.

A model in jewels from Sabyasachi Jewellery's Heritage collection.

**Was there a difference in approaching and creating jewellery for Bergdorf Goodman than it would be for your regular collections?**

The difference between jewellery for India and America lies in the point-of-view of the consumer. While India still looks at jewellery as investment, buyers in New York consume jewellery as art. While intrinsic value is important, it is not at the cost of design and aesthetics. In India, people still don't understand the concept of "high and low", because everyone wants to marry precious with precious. But in Bergdorf Goodman, my jewellery has a lot of audacity. We paired diamonds, rubies, and emeralds with wood, shell, unpolished coral, and a smattering of semi-precious stones. I think it was this audacity of design that makes the collaboration so successful.

**The pandemic has pivoted the global fashion industry towards minimalism and sustainability. Do you see such a discourse emerging in jewellery?**

While sustainability is an important conversation, controlled consumption is an equally important one. I don't think the future of craft is going to be minimal. In fact, it's quite the opposite. A new movement of art and culture is going to emerge, where detail and decoration are going to be more and more important. It has already started in architecture

and interior design, where we are seeing a big resurgence of Victorian details. I think the same will happen with jewellery. Because people will consume less, they will be motivated to buy only the exceptional.

**What motivated the design of the Sabyasachi Royal Bengal *mangalsutra*, and are there any plans to introduce more of such marital jewellery?**

I did the mangalsutra for a very specific wider audience. My clothes remain in the couture segment, and because my primary job is to sustain craft at its highest level, I recognise that I'm out of reach for many middle class consumers. I also realise/acknowledge that in spite of everything I have done in my career, I will be recognised more as a bridalwear designer in India.

While a lot of middle class Indian girls would hesitate to buy a Sabyasachi lehnga or sari for their wedding, they would buy the mangalsutra (an important marker of Hindu marriage), and still be an authentic 'Sabyasachi bride'. They look at jewellery as pure investment.

There are plans to embrace the vast cultural diversity of India and create markers across its length and breadth, as we want to be as inclusive with our jewellery as we are with our clothes. ■

A Tanjore painting of Kolanda Rama. Photo: MyAngadi



A Tanjore painting of Gaja Lakshmi. Photo: MyAngadi

# TANJORE PAINTINGS

## THE GUILD OF GOLD

*How gold foil on gesso made its way to Thanjavur paintings and why it endures*

BY VANGMAYI PARAKALA

“**A** *racha maave arachandirukkom*,” says Swaminathan Vishwakarma, 55, an award-winning Thanjavur painter.

He means that his community has been doing the same old, same old. Currently, the demand for innovation in themes and design details in Thanjavur paintings is close to negligible, and so is their incentive.

When Thanjavur paintings received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2007, commercial interest in the art had picked up, long after a brief spike in the early 990s. Following that, relatively cheaper, fake-gold foil sheets started making an appearance in the market—it encouraged hobbyists to keep the art alive, but also aided insincere profit-making motives.

Barring that, the form itself has barely evolved. Its characteristic idiom—the striking gold foil on gesso (a white paint mixture) with embedded gemstones, flat vivid colours, and divine figures—has stayed largely the same for close to a century.

This stagnancy, however, was not typical to Thanjavur art. In fact, the indispensable use of gold film on gesso would not have even come to be if it were not for the many initial experiments by the region’s artisans.

### GILDED BEGINNINGS

The Thanjavur painting as we know it today was a result of the region’s artisans imbibing the influences of “the Vijayanagara murals, and through it Deccani painting, court painting...traditional sculpture in wood...and...folk painting,” writes art historian Jaya Appasamy in *Thanjavur Painting of the Maratha Period*. The book is a detailed study of the art form, which has its roots in the 18th and 19th centuries.

When the Madurai Nayaks ruled as an extension of the larger Vijayanagara Empire, “the finer aspects of the Telugu culture trickled down after blossoming in the Vijayanagara kingdom,” says culture writer Veejay Sai. Later, when the Marathas gained control, they continued to patronise the arts in the region. This patronage led to a free flow of thoughts and techniques between visiting and resident artisans.

“The application of gold was borrowed rather than indigenous. There is no evidence that such an art existed in the past in southern India,” says Appasamy in her book, indicating that while folk art gave Thanjavur the idiom of “plump and sumptuous figures” with “large heads” and sculpture influenced the gesso, it is Deccani and Rajasthani painting that inspired its use of gold. By themselves however, the Thanjavur painters of yore were already “highly skilled” with jewellery, sculpture, and architecture.

What seems to have guided them however, was a dedication to durability coupled with a collective bhakti bhaava (devotional expression) over individual expression. It is this unique combination that has given Thanjavur paintings their biggest strength—the gold foil on gesso. It has also given it its biggest contemporary weakness—its decades-old stagnancy.

### GOLD SYMBOLISES FIRE, PURITY, WEALTH

Thanjavur art’s basic canvas-making process itself is a distinguishing feature. Two layers of cloth are pasted over a plank of jackfruit wood, with gum made from tamarind seeds; then, a paste of lime is painted over it. Once this dries and is polished with stone, a drawing is made demarcating sections. Finally, the artist sticks on the gold or gemstones with a gluey limestone paste, before painting in the colours.

“This wasn’t just an artistic or decorative choice. It was scientific,” says Veejay Sai. “Even the way they made dyes was such that it would protect the painting from insects. The paintings were made to last long,” he adds.



Swaminathan V works on a Nataraja canvas.

Over time however, ply boards, Fevicol and acrylic paint have replaced their natural, durable predecessors. “But the love for gold has endured,” says jewellery historian Usha R. Balakrishnan.

Traditionally, for centuries, families in South India have preferred gold jewellery over any other. Gold is non-reactive, does not rust or tarnish: it is pure, and therefore, auspicious.

“Gold has always symbolised fire; it is a symbol of purity. It symbolises wealth, and is an emblem of Lakshmi [the goddess of prosperity]. Threads of gold are woven into saris, it is in the gopuram (ornate entrance towers) of temples. It has a strong ritualistic significance within the Hindu dharma so to speak,” says Balakrishnan. “Even the Panchadhatu (traditional, sacred metal) for example has a small amount of gold added to it.

This very property also gave gold social currency. In many communities even today, a girl is sent to her

marital home with some gold as part of her personal wealth (streedhan, the protection of which is enshrined in the law) — the husband or his family cannot exercise claim over it.

### A SENSE OF PURE DEVOTION

There are also instances from early 18th century Thanjavur, when art that depicts gods adorned with gold jewellery, was presented at weddings. Incidentally, musicologist P. Sambamoorthy's biography of the saint-composer Tyagaraja (mid 1700s-early 1800s) mentions that a student, Walajahpet Venkataramana Bhagavatar, had presented a painting of Kodanda Rama (Rama with Bow) to his guru on Tyagaraja's daughter's wedding.

A photo of this painting found on Carnatic music forums online shows a clear early-Thanjavur style. The gold iconography is all there—the face of a yazhi, a mythical creature considered more powerful than a lion, in the background; an aarti cup (for ritualistic prayer) in the foreground.

Ram, Lakshman and Sita stand below a gold-coloured stylised frame of arches reminiscent of temple architecture. Sita has lines of gold at her waist, indicating a belt or a layered, waist-hanging jewel. Ram and Lakshman's bows are both strong strokes of gold. This theme, of Ram with a bow—the Kodanda Rama is still popular. The iterations that came after Tyagaraja's time had started to edge out the flat gold-yellow painted surfaces in favour of gold gilding on gesso. This led to the gold architecture that framed the canvas even more intricately embossed with floral swirls.

Over time, Sita began to have a prominent golden nose ring, similar to the large circular Maharashtrian nath. Soon, in many versions of this theme as well as in others, artists had begun to emboss the torsos of the gods entirely in gold.

“The sacred icons...and their highly decorated character was an expression of devotion,”

writes Appasamy. She quotes Philip Rawson, an expert in Eastern art: “the attitude towards ornament reflects an instinct deeply rooted in the Indian character. To ornament is also an expressing of respect...or other auspicious properties.”

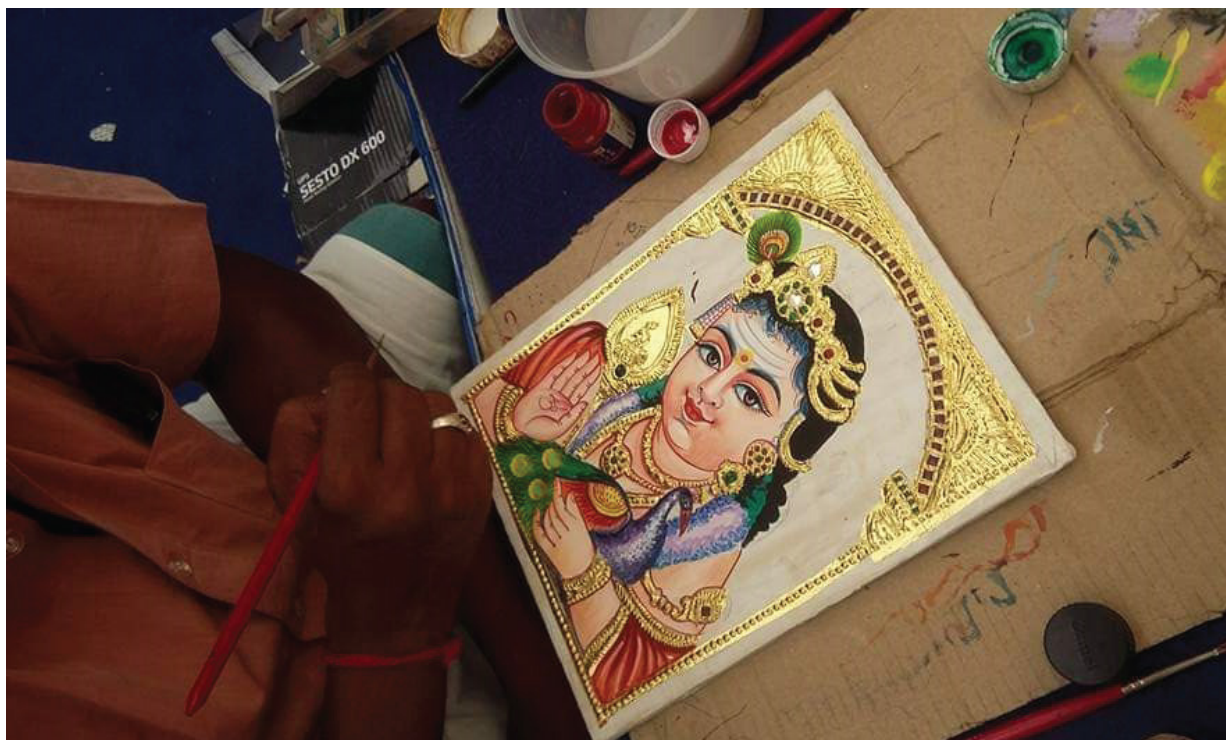
The fact that Thanjavur artists would not sign their name on their paintings further shows devotional loyalty in the practice.

### CURRENT SPARKLE AND COST

In what feels like a hat tip to the continuation of gold's history with Thanjavur paintings, artists today say that commercially available gold foil comes from Rajasthan and Gujarat. While artists prefer to stick to these, out of good conscience, they are also ready to



Swaminathan V with gold gessoed on a large canvas. Thanjavur paintings are usually small-format. Lately large canvases are made on commissions.



Swaminathan  
paints Lord Murugan.

cater to the budgetary needs of the market. For example, Swaminathan Vishwakarma has a simple price chart on his Facebook and Twitter pages, which his graphic designer son manages for him. A 12 x 10 painting with original gold will cost ₹4,500 while the same size with “second quality” gold will be cheaper only by a thousand rupees. This difference, of course, compounds as the sizes get bigger. He sets the price for a 4 feet x 3 feet work with pure gold foil at ₹1,20,000, while the second quality version costs ₹80,000.

Owning and adapting to market reality is the entrepreneurial innovation expected of Thanjavur artists now. However, most are reluctant to making changes in the designs. The architectural elements understandably remain constant, inspired as they are by ancient temples. Similarly, from the reticent way that the artists talk about changing the jewellery on their gods, it seems like these elements form symbolic and religious iconography—this has no scope to change with the times either.

“...the iconic style of Thanjavur painting fulfilled a function that was not primarily aesthetic...and became repetitious precisely because it was sacred,” writes Appasamy. Regular portraiture, which Thanjavur

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**OWNING AND ADAPTING TO MARKET REALITY  
IS THE ENTREPRENEURIAL INNOVATION  
EXPECTED OF THANJAVUR ARTISTS NOW.  
HOWEVER, MOST ARE RELUCTANT TO  
MAKING CHANGES IN THE DESIGNS**

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painters did briefly under the British, did not necessitate the grandeur typical to their art.

To this day the Navaneeta Krishna (baby Krishna with a pot of butter), Gajalakshmi (Goddess Lakshmi with elephants), Kodanda Rama all continue to be depicted under the gilded temple arches with flowers and the yaazhi. They continue to be adorned with a traditional golden kaasu malai (a chain made of small gold coins), medallion-like-pendants, and crowns just as they were over a century ago.

“I have been doing just what my forefathers did,” says the 70-year-old artist V. Gopi Raju. “As for my children, they accommodate doable requests, like if someone wants more stones in the work. But if it is something very different, they tell them it can’t be done.” ■

# HEIRLOOM BEADS OF THE NORTHEAST

*Beads and stones speak to us of distant worlds and travels even as they lie closeted in a box*

BY PARISMITA SINGH

**I**t is August, but the rains do not stop and Guwahati city's COVID-19 cases continue to rise. And here I am, sitting at my desk, thinking of beads and baubles and precious stones.

Though thoughts of beads, specifically the heirloom beads of many communities of the Northeast, are strangely fitting for the moment. Because beads and stones, speak to us of distant worlds and travels, even as they lie closeted away in a box or passed along the same family lineage for generations.

In many communities of Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, beads are highly valued and an important accessory for the many milestones in one's life from the birth of a child to marriage and death. These beads and neckpieces are often 'heirloom beads' or those that have passed down from generation to generation and have strong associations with a community's cultural and ethnic identity.

Interestingly, many of these heirloom beads do not come from this region. The red coral beads that adorn the traditional Khasi neckpiece called the 'paila' or the cowrie beads of the Nagas or the turquoise blue, glass melon beads of the Tani tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, to name a few.

Many of these have been within families, clans or the community for generations so much so that often, their origins are lost in myths and stories. Even while being so intrinsic to a community's identity, they carry within them an aura of foreignness, of the other, of travel through distant lands. Unlike traditional textiles often woven by the women of the tribe themselves, beads and precious stones travel. In fact, the further they travel, the higher their value.



Illustration by Parismita Singh.

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**UNLIKE TRADITIONAL TEXTILES  
OFTEN WOVEN BY THE  
WOMEN OF THE TRIBE  
THEMSELVES, BEADS AND  
PRECIOUS STONES TRAVEL**

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Left: Women of the Tagin Tribe in traditional costume and ornaments.

Bottom: A young Nyishi girl in traditional costume and ornaments.  
Photo: Shutterstock

The Tani group comprise the Nyishi, Apatani, Hill Miri, Adi and Tagin tribes of the hills of Arunachal and they have a range of heirloom beads. Even now, years after old trade routes have been discontinued, especially after the 1962 Sino India war, people of the Tani tribes make a distinction between ‘nyaloma’ beads or those ‘from Tibet’ and beads from India.

But where are these beads originally from? A tantalising question since Tibet did not produce beads in the past. One that the academic Barbie Campbell Coletook up. Campbell’s research on the turquoise-blue glass melon shaped heirloom beads of the Tani tribes (*BEADS: Journal of the Society of Bead Researchers* 2012) takes us on a narrative that reads like a detective novel of beads.

We travel from the rice fields of Ziro Valley in Arunachal Pradesh to the antiquities market in Lhasa, Tibet; along the ancient caravan routes to the Tibetan pilgrimage sites of Tsari and from there to the trade routes to Kunming in southwest China. One possible origin of the melon beads, she suggests, are the bead making workshops of 17th century Kunming in China. This is a long way for a bead to travel, one still worn by women in Arunachal today, and an enthralling comment on the journeys of beads.



In fact, Chera Devi, a Nyishi research scholar tells me, it's not just the distance; the more storied a bead, the higher its value. Chera shares her interest in beads with her mother, having researched on the value and significance of her family's heirloom beads. This is particularly apt, since beads are the one source of wealth controlled by women, passing down from mother to daughter.

While looking at the beads of the Nyishi tribe of the Kurung Kumey area, she writes: The Huyak Makiak neckpiece of the Nyishi tribe is the traditional glass bead worn by women. A single bead...priced at that equivalent to one fowl or a day's labour in the fields (*"The Legend of Abotani and Gumji San."* Chera Devi. Vol. III (1) CFEL Newsletter March 2019). These beads are today, a tenuous link between the many layered past and present. Despite a profusion of 'duplicates', heirloom beads continue to be a part of cultural continuity for the Tani communities amongst others. Even among the duplicates as they are popularly known, there is the question of finish and quality of the replicas. The flourishing bead markets of Naharlagun or the border markets of Assam are awash with many kinds of traditional beads. But Chera and her mother swear by the expertise of 'Mala Aunty' at the Naharlagun Bazaar, the lady who is said to be able to procure for you any bead you show her, through her intricate trade links.

But which set of her mother's beads, I ask Chera, does she have her eyes on? She laughs—that's only once her marriage is fixed. But she will definitely have a set of the Sangte heirloom beads, an essential for the Nyishi bridal trousseau.

I have no need of a trousseau, but once the pandemic is over, maybe I will make my way to Mala Aunty's shop and try my luck at a well-travelled bead or two.

Until then, we would be wise to heed another practice of lovers, who gift their beloved half of a broken bead, each holding on to a piece during absences until things are well, and they can put the two pieces of the bead together for the world to begin anew. This is the romance of beads in lockdown, a lesson for our pandemic times. ■



Top: A woman from the Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.  
Bottom: Beaded jewels of the Apatani Tribe in Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh.  
Photo: Shutterstock

# SOME MEN WEAR JEWELLERY

*What lies in the jewellery caskets of men? Designer Rajiv Purohit's collection of silver ornaments offers a sparkling gender-fluid answer*

BY SAUMYA SINHA



Rajiv Purohit.  
Photo: Madhav Mathur

The thing that instantly piques your fancy when you first see Rajiv Purohit—Design head (home) at lifestyle label Nicobar and menswear designer at Good Earth—in person or browse through his social media gallery, is his elegant and distinctive style cultivated with masterful drapes and an array of silver jewellery.

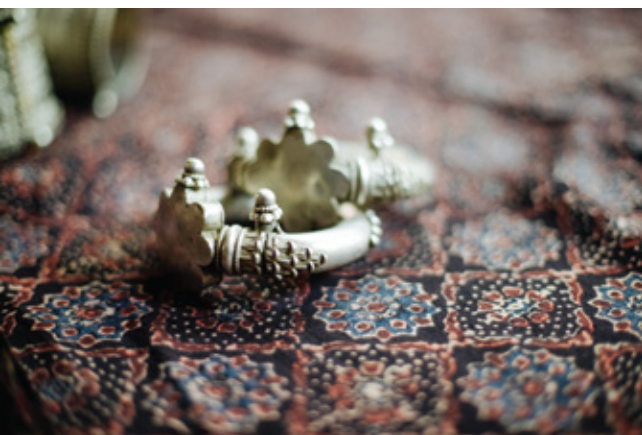
A connoisseur and collector of silver jewellery, Delhi-based Purohit's jewellery box is interestingly bereft of designer labels but enriched with artisanal, pre-loved and vintage jewels from all over the world. Amassed over several years, his collection includes silver bangles, necklaces, bracelets, thin and chunky, anklets, and more. Large ethnic *kadas* (bracelets) paired with a vest and trousers and anklets and tribal necklaces styled with a sari draped as a dhoti over a short kurta are some of the unusual ways in which Purohit experiments with his bijouterie.

“My love for jewellery is like a treasure hunt,” says Purohit, whose tryst with jewellery began in his hometown Jodhpur. Growing up in a Marwari family, he observed women at home adorn themselves with elements of *shringar* especially at weddings. “It made me wonder why men don’t wear jewellery and I decided to do so when I grew older.”

## GLOBAL JEWELS, GLOCAL SENSIBILITIES

A globetrotter, Purohit is always on the lookout for adornment & jewellery worn by local communities. For instance, once on a road trip from Ahmedabad to Patan in Gujarat, he came across women wearing bracelets made from black





Rajiv Purohit's silver jewellery collection featuring women's *kadas* (Left) which he wears in his hand and a *baju bandh* (Right) which he has restrung to wear as an arm band and as a *tussi* necklace. Photo: Madhav Mathur

lacquer with silver stripes—a design he had never seen before. The quest for that bangle took him to a town called Deeg in Rajasthan. Much of his collection has been curated in a similar fashion, through conversations with people which helped reveal the cultural significance of the pieces he owns, each embellished with riveting stories of its pursuit and history.

“In a country like India where cultural traditions are so rich, jewellery is a part of your identity. The style, make and weight change with every region and there is a very distinct flavour to regional jewellery, even if it is a part of the same state and the larger cultural history,” he says.

Most of Purohit's silver jewellery comes from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat but his pursuit for ornaments has taken him to small towns within the country and flea markets across the world. From the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, Turkey to tribal jewellery from the markets of Afghanistan and Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa; he has even been to the Swedish Laplands where he found bracelets and necklaces featuring work similar to *zardozi*.

Purohit's love for exploring the world through silver jewellery and textiles began in New York, where he lived for several years before returning to India six years ago. “Every weekend in NY, I visited the flea

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**A CONNOISSEUR AND COLLECTOR  
OF SILVER JEWELLERY,  
DELHI-BASED PUROHIT'S  
JEWELLERY BOX IS INTERESTINGLY  
BEREFT OF DESIGNER LABELS  
BUT ENRICHED WITH ARTISANAL,  
PRE-LOVED AND VINTAGE JEWELS  
FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD**

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markets where I found several Indian jewellery pieces.” It was also his introduction to Navajo (Native American) jewellery, featuring turquoise and silver, from antique dealers and flea markets.

Most of the jewellery Purohit owns are tribal pieces designed for women. He wears heavy anklets as bracelets or even necklaces and *kamarbandhs* (jewelled belts) on trousers. Seldom seen without silver *kadas*—one in each wrist—Purohit pays attention to balance, proportion and comfort. “The thing I love about the concept of adornment is that once you put it on, it becomes you; to me, jewellery is like a second skin.” His love for jewellery has also translated into a selection of bangles, inspired by the *chooda*—traditional bangles worn by Rajasthani woman—which he curated for Nicobar from 2017 to 2019.



## NO GENDER RESERVATIONS

Purohit's gender-neutral approach to jewellery also reflects in his sartorial choices—saris fashioned into dhotis, the draping style perfected over years of experiments. "Various sari drapes in India were purely based on their functionality in everyday life. For instance, women would roll up the hem of the sari to the knee and tie it on the waist for practicality. This motivated me to make the sari work for me," says Purohit who often wears saris draped as dhotis. He never alters or cuts the sari, and drapes it in a manner that looks different from the traditional styles.

In a country largely conservative about gender roles and clothing identity, Purohit's style has fortunately evoked a positive socio-cultural response. "In small towns or villages, people often think I am a tourist from of a foreign country only because I am wearing Indian clothes. It leads to a fun debate where I tell them that I am wearing clothes that are culturally appropriate to me whereas what you are wearing (shirt and trousers) is a foreign attire, and that's okay too," he says. "On the other hand, overseas people identify it as something traditional and cultural in a welcoming manner." He recalls an instance at an exhibition by Good Earth at Victoria and Albert Museum, London

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Rajiv Purohit. Photo: Madhav Mathur

where he wore a Chanderi sari as a *dhoti*, a blazer, vest and a bow tie which attracted queries and compliments from a varied cross-section of people including Dukes and Duchess.

Purohit hopes to influence more men to experiment with nonconformist fashion. He says, "India as a culture today is perhaps a little more conservative and prudish than it used to be (in the pre-colonial era), and staid in terms of gender roles and clothing. But I do know that people want to break the mould and try new ways of dressing, which is essentially the old way." He may not expect to see men ditch their lapel pins and jumpers, but is positive that more men will begin warming up to *dhotis* and *kadas*. ■

# THE BUSINESS *of* GOLD

*As gold prices climb high, the formula of its lustre and lucre rearranges itself*

BY PREETI ZACHARIAH



There was a time when Umme Hani, an IT professional, regularly invested in gold, as part of a monthly savings investment plan. Not this year, however. The skyrocketing price of gold—it currently hovers around the ₹49,000 per 10 gm—now makes it unaffordable, says the 31-year-old who made her last gold purchase in 2019. "I have ruled out buying gold this year," she says.

There are other customers, like Hani, who are hesitant to buy gold this year. The escalating price of the precious metal, coupled with the ecosystem that the current COVID-19 crisis has created—loss of jobs, salary cuts, a stoppage of celebratory occasions like weddings—has made many people step back and reassess their spending behaviour.

"We have seen that in the last 14-15 months, from the beginning of last year to today, gold has appreciated by over 45 per cent in a pretty short period of time," says, Arun Narayan, AVP Category, Marketing and Retail, Tanishq, Titan Company Limited. He adds that this is "certainly spooking a set of customers who see gold as a discretionary purchase. They have reduced their outlay or are staying away."

Not everyone, however, thinks this way, he underlines. "There are multiple customers, multiple segments," he says. And while some are staying away—for whom the purchase of gold is discretionary—there are others for whom the rise in price has "reaffirmed confidence in gold," he says. And for the latter, buying gold is "not discretionary but essential. There have been customers walking into showrooms since they re-opened, he says. "This could be, and is, a lot of pent-up demand because stores were shut for a period."



Somasundaram PR, Managing Director, India, World Gold Council, echoes the sentiment. He points out that while the second half of the year usually sees more demand for gold due to festive and wedding demand, “it is difficult to say how things will evolve this year as there are many factors that will shape recovery, the trend of the pandemic, disruptions out of localised lockdowns, price outlook and many more.”



### AN INSURANCE AGAINST ADVERSITY

Historically, gold prices expose the economic health of a country. When the economy does poorly—and the global economy is in the doldrums right now—gold prices automatically rise. According to Snehal Choksey, director of the Mumbai-based Shobha Shringar Jewellers, the pandemic has played a significant role in pushing up the prices. “Gold is the first commodity to get affected when any kind of natural or man-made calamity occurs,” he says.

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### **GOLD JEWELLERY HOLDS A LOT OF SENTIMENTAL VALUE FOR INDIANS, AND PEOPLE ARE UNLIKELY TO SELL THEIR JEWELLERY**

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Most investors see gold as a safe-haven investment in times of crisis, and this perception of gold contributes significantly to this sudden upsurge in price, in both domestic and international markets. “The outlook for gold has become favourable due to the current crisis,” believes Suraj Shroff, financial planner and founder of Infiniti Investments, predicting that the next 12-18 months will be very good for gold. And increasing gold allocations in your investment portfolio is probably a good idea right now. Not necessarily physical gold, however. “One trend now visible is that people are more open to buying financial or paper gold as you would call it,” he says. Unlike gold jewellery, bought and simply stowed away, people want to invest and make gains out of their investment. “You won’t sell a gold



Top: A customer wearing a face mask tries on gold jewellery in an Ahmedabad shop. Photo: Sam Panthaky / AFP.  
Bottom: A file photo of a jewellery store employee arranging gold necklaces at a showroom in Ahmedabad. Photo: Arun Sankar / AFP

chain, but you will sell a gold bond when the prices rise.”

Somasundaram agrees. “Due to the pandemic, the safe-haven demand for gold has increased and is reflected in inflows into gold ETFs (Exchange Traded Fund) lately, both globally and in India. The current situation is unprecedented as the movement of gold has been severely restricted due to lockdown. Therefore, demand was channelised into ETFs,” he says. However, he isn’t sure how trends will progress now that stores have opened. “KYC and compliance requirements differ widely between ETFs and jewellery trade, and so gold buying through jewellery trade will always be the preferred mode.

### FORGING A NEW BEGINNING

Even if one opts for physical gold, there is a chance



A customer tries a 22 carat gold necklace at a jewellery shop in Ahmedabad.  
Photo: Sam Panthaky / AFP

that people will choose coins and bars instead of jewellery. There has been a rise in the demand for coins, say most jewellers. “A change in buying behaviour is highly anticipated,” agrees Ankit Agarwal of Alankit Ltd., a leading e-governance service provider in India. Gold jewellery holds a lot of sentimental value for an Indian, and people are unlikely to sell their jewellery. “However, in the case of gold coins, it is more about long term wealth creation and maximising profit, leaving no room for sentiments. It is fair to say that during times of market volatility, investors will opt for gold coins instead of jewellery.”

Even if a customer wants to invest in jewellery, the purchasing experience is likely to be very different from the pre-pandemic one. COVID-19 has already forced jewellers to reassess design, strategy, brand positioning, inventory management and more. Throw in the ever-rising price of gold, “a huge challenge for everyone,” and you have an ecosystem that has “pushed us to think differently to survive,” believes Aditi Amin, founder of Uncut by Aditi Amin. She plans to take her operations online and



A pair of gold earrings from Tanishq's Aarambh collection.

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**MOST INVESTORS SEE GOLD AS A SAFE-HAVEN INVESTMENT IN TIMES OF CRISIS, AND THIS PERCEPTION OF GOLD CONTRIBUTES SIGNIFICANTLY TO THIS SUDDEN UPSURGE IN PRICE**

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launch pocket-friendly collections. “People are looking to buy, but not very expensive pieces,” she believes.

Tanishq's Narayan agrees. “I think this is compelled everyone to think, and new ways of generating demand, new ways of interacting with customers as well as relooking at gold in different ways,” he says, pointing out that design sensibilities today lean towards more lightweight, affordable jewellery. Conspicuous consumption and displays of wealth are no longer the order of the day, even with bridal jewellery, he adds. This forces brands to rethink design and form “to take a step back and press the refresh button.”■

# SECRETS OF THE DIAMOND ENGAGEMENT RING

*Pursuit, privilege, sentiment and symbolism—  
the engagement ring has many facets*

BY SNIGDHA AHUJA

**M**y earliest memory of the ring is stashed in the top drawer of a thirty-year-old dressing table.

It was there that a bar set ring with four tiny diamonds always sat, cradled in a plexiglass box.

My father had bought the engagement ring in 1984 from Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri—the only jewellery brand he had heard of at the time. To step inside the iconic shop (at Janpath, New Delhi) was a “dream come true”, he reminisces. For me, he was basically Nick Jonas shutting down Tiffany’s to get his Priyanka Chopra a cushion-cut diamond. Only without the price tag and all the paparazzi.

“We don’t have the tradition of ring exchange among Bengalis,” Sangeeta Chatterjee, 53, a Delhi-based school teacher tells me over a phone call. Like Chatterjee, her 30-year-old niece Annie did not exchange rings when she married in 2014. “There is no such concept!” she says, half exasperated.

In the pursuit of shining stories of commitment and carats, I cast the engagement ring as my protagonist. For those who have read American Wendy Doniger’s literary gem, *The Ring of Truth*, it is clear that jewellery has a relationship with humans and history that is deeper than surface ornamentation. The ring is at its centre—a signifier of lust, love, betrayal and belonging, depending on who you ask.



“Rings are not necessary for a traditional Indian wedding. However, modern society has adopted this ring ceremony into their culture,” reads a blog post by Kalyan Jewellers. The Thrissur-headquartered brand offers a variety to choose from, including matching engagement rings for couples and eternity rings meant to symbolise love that endures—with an unending circle of gemstones to signify continuity.

Many though design their own rings. Zenaida Pereira, a 31-year-old marketing professional from Mumbai did so when she married in 2014 in a Christian ceremony. “The wedding ring is important to signify commitment—With this ring, I thee wed. It’s supposed to be a simple band to represent humility,” says Pereira, who got “Amor Los Une” engraved inside her band—Spanish for “Love Unites Them.” But what about the engagement ring? “Well, I guess that’s what we learned from Hollywood,” she says. She wears both her rings on the same finger.

### THE ROCK THEORY

That De Beers revolutionised the business of the diamond engagement ring exemplifies an elaborate exercise in marketing a product. American copywriter Mary Frances Gerety coined the now iconic phrase—“A Diamond is Forever” for the diamond company in 1948, and couples around the world continue to buy into its gleam.

“A bride often chooses a ring that not only complements her style but is also versatile, something that can be worn from day to night,” Federica Imperiali, global head for product development at Forevermark—the jewellery brand owned by De Beers—writes in an email from Milan. She adds that while the classic “round shape” continues to be a favourite, Indian brides increasingly explore other shapes and settings. Jadau and polki remain significant, but understated pieces are becoming the new norm, especially for the wedding ring that is typically worn daily. “We always keep up with the mindset of consumers. Post pandemic, they will be looking for something simple and meaningful with value that lasts forever. Therefore, classic and elegant designs that amplify the beauty of the diamond will continue to dominate the market,” Imperiali predicts.

“In India, nine out of ten engagement rings feature diamonds,” says Rishabh Tongya, creative director at



Zenaida Pereira and Joshua Menezes on their wedding day in December 2014.

Diacolor that specialises in precious gemstones. It is followed by the sapphire that a few couples, mostly those who live abroad, opt for. In India the sapphire has complicated astrological associations so it is not the first stone of choice. He adds that a four-prong setting is favourite, but the engagement ring is just a “starter”—an opening dialogue of sorts—and the full course is served with jewellery sets and its iterations for the whole family.

There is also the fashion aspect. Earlier this year, iconic American brand Tiffany & Co. opened its doors to Indian consumers with a store in Delhi. A harbinger of the luxury engagement ring trend—it houses the brand’s wealth of emblematic gems and jewels, including the engagement ring in the trademarked Tiffany (six prong) setting which comes in the brand’s familiar robin egg blue box. At the store, a private salon for shoppers is furnished with a print of a personally-signed letter by Audrey Hepburn, the Hollywood actor who encrusted the brand into global consciousness forever.

Preferences may change, but size matters—and no, it



Top: Dilafroze Qazi (in red) during a pre-wedding ceremony in 1987.

Right: A collection of diamond engagement rings. Photo: Shutterstock

is not a big city thing. “How many carats you carry on your ring is more important than ever,” says Pooja Abrol Khurana who has been operating a boutique jewellery brand in Jammu for two decades. “The focus is on solitaires, and nothing below two and a half carats,” Khurana says, adding that brides-to-be call the shots when it comes to the engagement ring.

Traditional Nama sets and Dogri *jhumkas* continue to be popular buys in Kashmir locally, but engagement rings transcend traditions. “I haven’t sold a gold ring in a decade,” Khurana quips, adding that for those who can afford it (and even for those who can’t, she insists) there is no replacement for the diamond—the bigger, the better.

## RINGING IN POPULAR CULTURE

One-kneed proposals, promise rings, commitment bands, engagement parties—the marketability of the “she said yes” adage, has been amplified by pop



culture, cinema and commerce. Like the pre-wedding photoshoot, the allure of the diamond engagement ring has been preened and polished for the Indian couple, fuelled by Instagram influence and social media cred.

“In my days, a proposal would be popularly “fixed” by exchanging a 10 gm gold Edward guinea coin,” says Dilafroze Qazi. The noted Pattan-based educationist adds that a ring exchange was uncommon, unless it was an upper-class family wanting to mimic the ritual followed by relatives in the West. When she married in 1987, rings were a rarity, but today, they are a (material) rite of passage. “The men also know what they want,” Qazi emphatically adds. The ring may shine brighter, but



Judith Liesenfeld and Karan Vaid on their wedding day.

it continues to exist alongside community rituals in the Valley like a tea where the empty cup (*pyaala*) is filled with money to signify the start of new relationships in certain Shia Muslim families.

Sometimes, it poses a cultural conundrum. “Until the moment we stepped on this little balcony and Karan pulled out the ring box, I wasn’t aware of the significance,” says Judith Liesenfeld from Germany, who married Karan Vaid earlier this year in a Hindu ceremony in Delhi. Karan proposed to Judith with an 18-carat gold ring with a blue topaz from a Berlin-based jewellery designer. The wedding ring, exchanged later during the ceremony, is also 18-carat gold and encrusted with diamonds, while Karan, 32, wears a platinum band. All rings were paid for by the couple.

When researching on the Vedic marriage ceremony to create a translation for German guests, Karan discovered borrowed rituals—like the ring exchange, which is a Western one. “So it became even more important as it symbolised solemnisation from the German perspective too,” he says.

## VALUE AND WISDOM

Some though will defy conventions. Like Jasbir Bhatia, a 59-year-old Gurugram-based educationist who married in the mid-80s and never saw the ring or any other jewelled symbolism pertinent in her relationship. A mindset that inspired her to be flexible with the tradition with her daughter-in-law, a marketing professional who doesn’t wear her wedding ring every day.

I own a Swarovski crystal ring—given by my husband a few months before we tied the knot. No wedding rings were exchanged. Instead, a gift of a Himachali Dogra maang teeka crafted in silver in 1956, bereft of precious stones, sits poignantly in a warm corner of my closet. A token of “generational wisdom” capsuled in an heirloom, making the absence of the diamond ring inconspicuous. But would I ever consider buying myself a carat or two?

To quote “Bond” singer Shirley Bassey: “Diamonds are forever, sparkling round my little finger. Unlike men, the diamonds linger.” ■

# THE RISING TIDE OF FIRST GENERATION JEWELLERS

*Jewellery in India may be a generational business, but independent designers carve a niche with unique design vocabularies*

BY SOHINI DEY

“I used design solutions and methodology even to solve business challenges,” says Pallavi Foley. After a decade at Tanishq, where she designed a number of collections, and crowns for the Miss India pageant, Bengaluru-based Foley launched her independent label of fine jewellery in 2009. “The leap was massive, now that I see it in retrospect,” she adds. “My biggest challenge was everything, apart from creativity.”

Foley is among a growing number of independent designers who stand out amongst numerous family businesses that dominate the Indian jewellery industry. The generational nature of the industry implies that skills and secrets are passed down like heirlooms. Most jewellery retailers keep leadership positions within the household, with each generation taking charge and adding new dimensions to the businesses.

In a recent interview with *The Voice of Fashion*, couturier and jewellery designer Sabysachi Mukherjee brought up the issue of nepotism in the industry saying, “The future of the Indian jewellery industry is going to be about professionally run businesses, with founders possessing a unique design edge.” TVOF spoke to four designers from across the country to examine how aesthetics and personal determination have helped them find a place in the spotlight.

## FIRST GENERATION ORIGIN STORIES

While Foley pursued jewellery as a career, other designers have found their way into the industry in myriad, sometimes unexpected, ways. Sunita Shekhawat, Jaipur-based designer who started her eponymous brand 25 years ago, became inclined towards the craft after watching jewel smiths of the Pink City’s Johri Bazaar, and found her first clients among peers. “I invited a few friends home and asked if I could design a piece of jewellery for them,” she says.

Shekhawat did not charge for the designs—she received good reviews and one of her first commissioned designs came from Maharani Hemlata Raje of Jodhpur. “She gave me pearls in three colours—white, pink and black—and asked me to design them

Top to Bottom: A pair of ‘Teardrop’ earrings from Uncut by Aditi Amin’s festive collection; a floral bangle from Sunita Shekhawat’s black enamel collection; a 22k gold and turquoise necklace from Pallavi Foley’s ‘Wild Mushrooms’ collection.

into earrings. Till date, I often see her wearing those earrings when I meet her,” Shekhawat says.

Aditi Amin, Ahmedabad-based designer, began creating jewellery while staying home to take care of her two children including a new-born son. “I dismantled my old pieces and recreated them. It was fashion jewellery, but friends encouraged me to design a collection,” she says. Amin created fashion jewellery for a few years before taking a sabbatical in 2018 to study jewellery design. Encouraged by her mentor and family, she launched two labels in 2019—Argento, focused on silver jewellery, and Uncut, a minimalist *polki* label.

Family and peers often serve as early clients for independent designers. Delhi-based jewellery designer Neha Dani, a graduate of the Gemological Institute of America in Southern California, worked at International Gemological Institute’s Mumbai laboratory till a cousin asked her to design her wedding jewellery. She went on to create custom pieces and capsules, hosted exhibitions in Mumbai and Bengaluru, and now retails to an international clientele.

### TRIALS AND LEARNINGS

According to Shekhawat, who studied jewellery manufacturing and gemmology before she began designing, one of the fundamental differences between joining a family business and starting one’s own brand is gaining credibility and trust. “I have given so many litmus tests over the years; many people assumed that I did not know enough. I was a woman, from a non-jewellery background—it was a deadly combination,” she laughs.

For designers without a background in jewellery manufacturing and retail, the trials can be manifold. Amin says that capital investment can be a colossal challenge, followed by developing a loyal clientele. She says, “I was lucky because my family was well-known and their backing put me on a higher playing field. Getting into the business without family lineage or the kind of money need to start up, can pose big barriers to entry.”

Yet, having an independent setup has its rewards. “One of the advantages of being a first jewellery designer is that I have tremendous flexibility,” Amin

adds. “I am not bound by preconceived notions of form and structure that I have to carry forward. It has helped the brand make quick decisions, change plans and move forward.” Shekhawat says that her ability to personalise the process in every step of the operations, from catering to clients to marketing and promotions, sets her apart from conventional retailers.

### DESIGN AS BRAND USP

In conversations with these first generation jewellers, a unique design language often emerges as a key differentiator. “If I am entering a new field with established players, how can I be different from what is already available,” asks Amin. She chose to work with *polki*, for its Indian origin and limited explorations beyond heavy-set designs. The Uncut Micro Polki line, priced under 1 lakh, contemporises the traditional uncut diamonds in chic chains and ear studs.



Clockwise from top left: Sunita Shekhawat, Pallavi Foley, Aditi Amin, Neha Dani.

Dani is known for her complex, highly detailed jewels that mimic sinuous flora and fauna, surreal marine creatures and sculptural shapes. “My craftsmen individually carve the pieces in wax – placing petals, leaves, or other forms, which I personally solder together,” she says about her process. “Then I find the right centre or coloured stones for each piece and plan its colour palette, set using a combination of artisanal techniques and innovative materials.” Dani won the Rising Star Award at the JCK jewellery show in Las Vegas (USA) in 2014; her designs were also showcased at Sotheby’s ‘In Bloom’ exhibition in New York in 2019. Economics does not direct Dani’s aesthetics. “My pieces are based on my own creative process – they are not based or driven by specific markets,” she says.

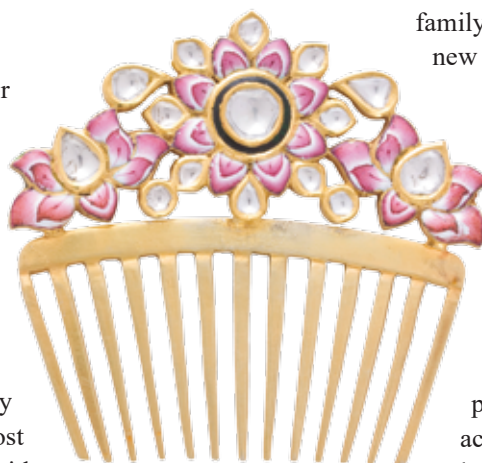
Shekhawat has gained repute for her improvisations on traditional crafts. “I realised that at weddings or festivities, women were often decked up in similar kinds of jewellery. People would normally go to the same jewellers, and designs were borrowed from family members,” she says. Her most popular experiments are with *meenakari* (enamelling). Lotus pink jewelled hair combs, powder blue chandelier earrings and rich black bangles—over the years, Shekhawat has incorporated many new shades in the technique. “*Kundan-meena* is dominated by colours like red and green. I introduced different colours, then new combinations; now, we are also getting into French enamelling,” she says.

Foley too works on Indian jewellery techniques, reworking them in new forms encompassing geometry, floral and abstract shapes. Among recent

collections, she has created a line of uncut diamond jewellery and one comprising miniature *jaali* eggs crafted from 18kt gold. The eggs are carved with prayers using filigree and fret saw work. “The change in the jewellery industry is the acceptance of innovation as a necessary vehicle to move forward,” she adds. “Design is the focal point for most jewellery companies and corporates now.”

## BREAKING THE MOULD

In tandem with the rise of independent designers, the industry has changed significantly in recent decades. Jewellery has traditionally been a male bastion, but more women are entering the field, including in family run brands. Digital platforms and new retail models have enabled independent designers to bypass the challenges of scaling up. Engaging with customers on social media lends credibility. Amin, who has a new ecommerce site for Uncut in the works, says. “One doesn’t need to own a big showroom or a chain to reach clients. A lot of things have moved to virtual platforms. Popups offer a lot of accessibility for brands. The market is changing very fast.”



An enamelled hair comb designed by Sunita Shekhawat.

The success of Tanishq, which launched in the Nineties, has ushered in a new culture of corporatisation in the industry. The brand has 328 stores across India today, and by 2017, had propelled the worth of Titan’s jewellery division to ₹10,000 crore. Foley’s tenure at the Tata-run retail brand offered valuable lessons in starting up. “Being a first generation jeweller was hard, but I didn’t know any different. For me it was always about creating a culture for myself and my team where creativity could flourish,” she says.

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**THE CHANGE IN THE JEWELLERY INDUSTRY IS THE ACCEPTANCE OF INNOVATION AS A NECESSARY VEHICLE TO MOVE FORWARD. DESIGN IS THE FOCAL POINT FOR MOST JEWELLERY COMPANIES AND CORPORATES NOW**

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For Shekhawat, the industry’s transformation shows most prominently in changing perceptions. From being an independent solo woman jeweller who had to often remind her *karigars* that she knew the intricacies of jewellery manufacturing, she has come a long way. “Now the same *karigars* send their daughters to me for advice,” she says. “What can be better than that.” ■

# JEWELS THAT HURT

*Neck rings and ear plates—some jewellery traditions permanently change the contours of human bodies*

BY DAVID ABRAHAM

**J**ewellery forms an important part of our material culture. Examples of jewellery have been found by archaeologists at sites of the earliest human settlements. Some of the earliest examples are beads made from small seashells and ostrich egg shells. Stone bracelets and marble rings dated to more than 40,000 years have also been found during excavations.

The human urge to decorate, ornament and adorn the body throughout the ages is common to all cultures. Jewellery has served as a marker for one's position in social, cultural or religious groups. Just as it does today.

The relationship between jewellery and the human body is complex. Though jewellery is designed to enhance beauty, there is a darker side to this pursuit.

We associate jewellery with beauty and pleasure. We rarely associate it with pain. There are, however, many types of jewellery that cause suffering and, in some cases, extreme physical distress as they require the human body to undergo different forms of mutilation. This can range from the piercing of the ear lobe to wear a simple silver stud to the dramatic neck rings of the Padaung women of Myanmar.

The elongated necks of the Padaung women are considered a sign of beauty and status in their community. Coils of brass are worn around their necks to elongate them. The dramatic neck rings gradually push down the collarbones and the upper ribs to give the appearance of a much elongated neck.

Large rings are first placed on young girls; over the years, more and more rings are added to create the impression that their necks are elongated by up to 10 to 15 inches. These rings are permanently worn and can weigh up to 9kg. After years of wearing these neck rings, they cannot be removed as the muscles of the neck are so weak that the wearer can suffocate without their support.

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**DEFINITIONS OF HUMAN BEAUTY VARY FROM CULTURE TO CULTURE. THIS DIVERSITY IS REFLECTED IN THE MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF JEWELLERY**

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Woman of Padaung tribe, Myanmar, wearing neck rings.  
Photo: Shutterstock





Top: Woman of Padaung tribe, Myanmar, wearing neck rings. Photo: Shutterstock

Bottom: A woman from the Mursi tribe in Ethiopia, wearing a lip plate. Photo: Shutterstock



Though these examples may seem unusual to us, the practice of body modification is commonplace around us too. It is in fact so prevalent that we rarely pay attention it.

The most obvious examples are the piercings on the earlobe and the nose. Earrings, however, can range from a single earring to the multiple earrings worn all around the ear. These require many piercings such as the multiple elongated silver earrings worn by some communities in Kutch which cause the ear to fold over with the weight. Other ear ornaments require the lobe of the ear to be stretched to form large openings into which discs of varying sizes can be inserted. Some earrings are so heavy that they cause the ear lobes to stretch down and elongate unnaturally such as the *paambadam*, a type of earring that was earlier popular in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Definitions of human beauty vary from culture to culture. Standards of beauty are as varied as the different cultures found across Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas. This diversity is reflected in the many different types of jewellery found around the world.

Another ornament that may seem discomforting and painful to an outsider is the lip plate, worn by some African and South American tribes. These large wooden discs are indications of esteem and status. This ornament involves modifying the mouth, as a lip plate, or labret, is inserted into an opening made in the upper or lower lip. The process usually begins when a girl is in her teens. Increasingly larger discs—up to several inches in diameter—are inserted into the pierced hole to stretch to the lips and accommodate the discs. Lip plates can go up to 20cm in diameter.

Nose rings too range from the simple to the extreme. In some cases, the *nath* (nose ornament) can consist of a large heavy hoop so weighed down with gems that it needs to be supported with a chain to prevent the cartilage in the nose from being damaged. Pleasure and pain are separated by a very fine line. Over the ages some philosophers have suggested that these two seemingly opposing sensory perceptions are closely related. They can be viewed as the opposite ends of the same continuum.

To suffer in the pursuit of beauty has always been a part of the fashion narrative. The six-inch stiletto heeled shoe, and the boned corset are forms of modification which are impermanent but can cause discomfort and pain. Piercings, scarification and extreme tattooing are permanent modifications. They reveal the extent of suffering the human body will endure in the pursuit of beauty. ■

# TRINKETS AND TATTOOS WEARING JOHNNY DEPP

*Earrings, necklaces, fedoras, rings, bracelets and ink...long before American men warmed to jewellery, Captain Jack Sparrow did.*

BY CYNTHIA GREEN

We use the expression “to wear jewellery,” but the accessories we choose say more about us than we say about them. Society is at a crossroads. How do we wear our truth? How do we keep our individuality without being swallowed up by passing group obsessions? How do we keep thinking when, more and more, we are told what to think? I see all of this in how jewellery wears Johnny Depp.

In his 2005 book *Johnny Depp Starts Here*, Murray Pomerance, Professor of Sociology at Ryerson University in Toronto says, “What makes Depp so peculiar and so vitally interesting, is exactly that he is ungraspable.” He also says that Depp is “first and foremost a musician, who sings his roles.” Knowing that Depp started out as a musician and still is (he co-formed the band Hollywood Vampires with Alice Cooper and Aerosmith’s Joe Perry in 2015), this is a beautiful image. It connects with Depp’s admiration of Charlie Chaplin’s ability to express “without words”. It also surfaces in the soft tonality of the actor/musician’s voice and in his visual connection with jewellery.

The very little we have seen of Depp these last few months is sombre, bespectacled and dark-suited. Adornments are few—earrings and perhaps a scarf or a tie. He is often photographed walking up or down courtroom steps at the time. This article is not about anything that goes around that. This is a look at the artist’s relationship with jewellery.

Depp’s jewellery has evolved over the years. The necklace, brown leather wrist cuff and fedora (the latter two from the late 80s) are items he still wears today. So are the earrings. From early on, before many men in the US wore earrings, he did. Like today, it was often one in the right and two or three in the left.

Earrings, like tattoos, take ownership in a way that other jewellery does not. They pierce the skin. They enter the body. Body rings can be changed like art on a wall, but a hole in the ear, like the nail in a wall, is constant. Earrings physically alter you. This seems particularly pertinent for an analytical person like Depp, who speaks of ageing



Top: Johnny Depp wearing the safety pin earrings. Photo: Tobias Schwarz/AFP

Middle Row (L): US actor Johnny Depp gestures as he leaves the High Court after the final day of his libel trial against News Group Newspapers (NGN), in London. Photo: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP

Middle Row (R): Depp greets fans on the red carpet during the Japanese premier of his latest film. Photo: Toshifumi Kitamura/AFP

Bottom: Depp wearing the Beaded Hearts Bracelet. Photo: Evan Agostini/AFP

as earning the “cracks in your face” and describes the characters he plays, as sharing the common thread of being “misunderstood. And judged in a condescending manner, in a bad way,” as he said in one of his interviews. (TCM Cinéma)

Over the last decade though, he has often taken to covering his “real estate,” as he regularly calls his skin, with jewellery. From scarves in his hair and pocket, around his neck and wrist, to multiple necklaces, bracelets, rings on almost every finger, double belts, pins...

Some call it an attempt to stand out (as if he needs to do that). Others, a wall to hide behind. But that ignores the artist in the man. A painter does not stop painting. A musician keeps learning new songs. A decorator keeps decorating. When jewellery uses us as its prop, it adds shape, colour, texture. We feel the weight of it. It connects us to ideas and memories.

On Johnny Depp, jewellery transcends social convention. It morphs with him to become rock musician and pirate (he created the persona Jack Sparrow in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films from the beads he wove into his hair and beyond). His fatherhood encircles his wrists (in bracelets beaded by his daughter). When jewellery layers his body in a riot of colours and textures until we see it before we see him, it echoes music notes covering a score. Johnny Depp does not divulge the significance of all his jewellery, but here are some key pieces.

### THE GONZO CROSS

Depp’s friend Hunter S. Thompson, whose journalistic style was dubbed “gonzo” (Italian for “simpleton”), used this six-fingered fist around a peyote button to symbolise subjective journalism. Depp wears it on a chain in memory of his dead friend.

### THE DEATH IS CERTAIN CLUB SKULL RING

Depp, musician Iggy Pop, filmmaker Jim Jarmusch and novelist and tattoo artist Jonathan Shaw—who has done much of the ink work on Depp’s skin—formed the Death is Certain Club in the 1990s. They bought four matching Jim Skull rings from the jeweller Albrizio at C’est Magnifique in New York City (The Telegraph), and all of them but Iggy Pop got matching Death is Certain Tattoos.



Johnny Depp wearing the Gonzo Cross. Photo: Frederick M. Browchi

### THE BEADED HEARTS BRACELET

A bracelet of colourful plastic beads that his daughter, the model and actor Lily-Rose Depp strung for him when she was a little girl.

### FEATHER EARRING

A single earring a boy gave Depp as gift when he was walking through a crowd. Not only does he wear it off-stage sometimes, but he also made it Tonto’s earring in his 2013 film *The Lone Ranger*. (Raya Scoop)

### SAFETY PIN EARRINGS

Speaking at the premiere of his latest film *Minamata* at the Berlinale Film Festival in February this year, Depp wore a scarf and his jewellery was minimal. A watch, a series of silver and turquoise bracelets on both wrists and dangling silver earrings. The ones with safety pins are a nod to the punk rock era, and he has worn variations of them for years, including fine jewellery variants by LA-based celebrity jeweller Anita Ko.

Johnny Depp’s jewellery accompanies him through life. Though spectators see pieces come and go, we can never know what stays in his vast collection, or the symbiotic relationship that exists between them. ■



A Malayali Bride. Photo: Shutterstock

# IF SHE IS MALAYALI, SHE LOVES GOLD

*Gold is a Malayali woman's BFF. But don't be misled into thinking it's just an expensive indulgence.*

BY SHEILA KUMAR

**T**he latest scandal down south involves the state of Kerala, a woman named Swapna Suresh and 30 kgs of smuggled gold. Not surprisingly, the incident has led to snide comments yet again on Kerala's gold-love.

Actually, we need to parse that term, gold-love. Fact is, Kerala's menfolk are not really into gold. You will find a handful of men sporting thick gold chains and gleaming signet rings, but those you will find across the country, too.

Those who drool over jewellery crafted from the effulgent metal, saving/borrowing/spending money on it, decking themselves and their female kin with chest loads, wrist loads, finger loads of it, are Kerala's women. The Kerala woman's gold-love is a singularly fierce, steadfast kind of attachment, one that often borders on obsession.

A recent World Gold Council study pegged the monthly per capita spend on gold ornaments in Kerala (urban sector) at close to ₹190; the second place went to Tamil Nadu, but at a mere ₹44.86.

Another WGC survey found that about 40 per cent of gold from the Indian gold jewellery market is

consumed by the four southern states. Kerala, to no one's surprise, is the biggest individual consumer, with a seasonal buying pattern peaking in April-May and September-December, hitting lows during the June-August monsoons.

### GOLD LOVE: LEGENDS AND LIFE

Intriguingly, this loud display sits ill at ease with a state known for and proud of its everyday simplicity, as seen in off-white clothing, Kasavu saris, simple thaalis (gold chains with pendants worn as signs of marriage) worn by the Hindu women, and the traditional ancestral homes which are a tasteful low-key meld of wood and exposed brick.

An interesting theory posits that the Malayali's affair with the gleaming metal dates back to when the state used to send out its fabled spices to Italy, Greece and the Arabia of yore, receiving enormous amounts of gold in exchange. Inexorably, owning and displaying this gold became a show of prestige.

An apocryphal legend has it that once the sanctum of a temple is open, spiritual energy flows directly to the worshipper. Since most Kerala temples mandate that men enter shirtless, they supposedly become direct beneficiaries of that spiritual energy. The women, though, are perforce clothed, so their (many) gold ornaments supposedly act as a conductor of this energy.

Yesteryear factors like the Gulf boom and the rising rates of rubber, which worked to the advantage of private plantation owners as well as the state, have also played their part. Then, in the absence of too many other investment opportunities in a state not exactly known for its industrial growth, land and gold are popular investment instruments, the latter gaining

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**EVERY MALAYALI SEES GOLD JEWELLERY  
AS A LIQUID ASSET, TO MORTGAGE OR  
SELL ON THAT PROVERBIAL RAINY DAY...  
AS A SIGN OF SECURITY TO SHORE UP  
THEIR FUTURE**

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A ball chain necklace fringed with pendants.

an edge because of its high liquidity factor. Then there is the trend factor. Someone set the brides- in-breastplate- armour trend rolling, a little over a decade ago, and endgame seems nowhere in sight.

Maybe the pandemic currently surging through the world will curb this gold-love? Do not hold your breath. As Mallika Ramachandran, 61, Delhi-based homemaker and keen observer of Malayali mores, says, "The Malayali woman will buy more because while she was sitting at home, she was looking at jewellery ads, her mouth-watering!"

Suresh Kumar, GM of Bhima Jewellers in Trivandrum, avers that the pandemic did not hit sales as hard as they had anticipated. The jewellery schemes floated by the company have always done well, and people continue to book jewellery. Those with family weddings looming on the horizon are also buying, he says.

Malayalam film stars and their families are regular customers at the big showrooms, and expected to head back to the jewellery counters as soon as the situation



A *thaali* worn by married Malayali women.  
Photo: Shutterstock

becomes more convivial. The modern boutique jewellers admit that sales are 'dull' because of the shutdown on coffee mornings, kitty parties and club socials, but have every confidence in the long-term allure of jewellery for the Malayali woman, so feel business is definitely going to pick up sooner than later.

### SIGN OF SECURITY

But here's the thing: every Malayali sees gold jewellery as a liquid asset, to mortgage or sell on that proverbial rainy day. Most see owning jewellery as a sign of security to shore up their future.

Bangalore-based lawyer Niranjana Menon, 29, makes a pertinent point: "Malayali women are gold-crazy but not jewellery-crazy. Gold is their safe back-up plan." Social approval is the other major reason Malayali women wear so much of conspicuous jewellery. Says Sunita Malik, 53, a homemaker in Singapore, "In indigent families, jewellery is pawned or used to service a husband's drinking, gambling or unemployment problem. In wealthier families, it's a gauge of family wealth, about impressing society."

The buying pattern is distinct: it's women over

thirty-five who buy jewellery regularly, impulsively, enthusiastically. Ganga Jayakumar, 52, owner of the hugely popular Trivandrum salon The Mirror, states, "I buy jewellery whenever I have money in hand, it's my emotional sustenance." The younger lot are more clear-eyed. Says Shilpa G, 26, a dentist living in Braunschweig, Germany, "I just am not a jewellery person. I mix high street with low, and happily wear trinkets, too." Nina Karun, 22, a producer with a radio station in Bengaluru, is clear where she stands. "When I have enough money, I use it on travel. Buying jewellery would be a waste of that money." Then again, these young women, by their own admission, own or stand to inherit substantial pieces from their mothers, so can afford to be casual about jewellery.

By and large, a woman's ornaments, *streedhan* or not, is still her own property, irrespective of the Malayali community she belongs to, though there are some exceptions where the fight reaches the courts. Says Ayesha Afsar, 59, a homemaker staying in Saudi Arabia, "The jewellery I received from my husband at the time of my *nikah* is considered as *mahar* (bride price), and is solely mine."

The Malayali woman's gold-love? It is what it is. The rest of India needs to get over it. ■

# GEM SHOW

## JEWELLERY IN CINEMA

*Films from India and abroad starring jewellery as protagonist, pundit or storytelling device*

BY ADITI RAO



Still from *Devdas*.

***To Catch a Thief, 1955*** - Alfred Hitchcock's romantic thriller stars Grace Kelly as an American heiress who tries to lure a former thief, played by Cary Grant, into stealing her diamond necklace.

***Monihara, 1961*** - The short film *Monihara* (Lost Jewels) is part of Satyajit Ray's anthology *Teen Kanya*, based on Rabindranath Tagore's short story by the same name. It tells the story of Manimalika, a woman who seeks to fill the emotional void in her life with jewellery. Designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee tried to employ Tagore's metaphor as a theme for his heritage jewellery campaign but received flak for it.

***Breakfast at Tiffany's, 1961*** - The opening scene of this romantic comedy based on Truman Capote's novella of the same name shows Holly Golightly (Audrey Hepburn) outside a Tiffany & Co store in New York dressed in an elegant LBD designed by Hubert De Givenchy. It is paired with an opulent pearl and diamond Chanel necklace and a complementary diamante tiara from Tiffany, inadvertently giving us one of Hollywood's most iconic fashion moments.

***Umrao Jaan, 1981*** - Muzaffar Ali's *Umrao Jaan*, for which Rekha (the eponymous *Umrao*) picked up a National Award, was a master class in authentic Mughal costumes and jewellery. The film was almost shelved due to lack of financing and Rekha is known to have worn a mix of sourced ornaments and some of her own jewellery in the film.

***Titanic, 1997*** - Rose's fictional 'Heart of the Ocean' necklace is a character in its own right in James Cameron's epic film. Rose, the anarchist, has her artist lover Jack (Leonardo Di Caprio) paint a picture of her in the nude wearing only the necklace gifted by her fiancé Cal (Billy Zane). Decades later, when the painting is found in *Titanic*'s shipwreck the entire story comes tumbling from a reluctant 100-year-old Rose who is still in possession of the necklace.

***Khoon Bhari Maang, 1988*** - This '80s feminist thriller stars a sassy Rekha as Aarti who pays for her own plastic surgery with a pair of expensive diamond studs after she survives a deadly crocodile attack executed by her husband Sanjay (Kabir Bedi). Post-surgery, Aarti adopts a new identity, becomes Jyoti, a supermodel, and plots revenge to get her two children back from her killer husband.

***Devdas, 2002*** - In Sanjay Leela Bhansali's adaptation of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel, *Devdas* (played by Shah Rukh Khan) uses a pearl necklace to inflict a wound on Paro's (Aishwarya Rai Bachchan) forehead just before her wedding. Later, as he breathes his last outside Paro's mansion, he is seen symbolically clutching pearls from that necklace. Interestingly, a fishing rod was used in place of the necklace in the film's 1936 version directed by Pramatesh Barua. Another piece of jewellery in the narrative is a *kangan* (bangle) belonging to *Devdas*'s grandmother that he gives to Paro like a commitment ring, who then passes it on to Chandramukhi, the courtesan who falls in love with *Devdas*.



**Lord of the Rings, 2001-2003** - True to its name, the trilogy, based on J.R.R. Tolkien's epic novel, has the ring at its centre. The ornament acquires myriad meanings as Frodo's journey advances and those that encounter it are overcome with longing for power over others, which further strengthens its maker, the evil Sauron.

**Omkara, 2006** - In Vishal Bharadwaj's adaptation of Othello (part of his Shakespearean trilogy), Omkara (Ajay Devgan) entrusts his new bride Dolly (Kareena Kapoor Khan) with an heirloom kamarband (waistband) which passes through several characters, through lust, revenge and manipulative twists, to become an instrument of hysteria and suspicion, leading to the film's tragic climax.

**Jodha Akbar, 2008** - According to director, Ashutosh Gowariker, jewellery played a significant role in the film and was an eloquent testimony to 16th century India. "One aspect of the script that kept emerging and evolving over time is the jewellery. We wanted it to not only add to the visual splendour of the movie, but also convey the emotions that represented Akbar and Jodha's historic union," he said at a press conference. Miniature paintings and texts like the Akbarnama were studied closely to ensure that the ornaments were an authentic representation of Mughal and Rajput styles. The wedding set worn by Jodha Bai (Aishwarya Rai) weighed about three-and-a-half kilos.

**Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara, 2011** - Zoya Akhtar's enjoyable film starts with a pre-wedding bachelor trip before Kabir (Abhay Deol) is to wed his girlfriend Natasha (Kalki Koechlin). Kabir and his two closest friends, Arjun (Hrithik Roshan) and Imraan (Farhan Akhtar), holiday around Spain. When Natasha sneaks up on the bachelor trip, an uneasy Kabir finally confesses to his friends that it was never his intention to propose to her and how the ring he bought for his mother as a birthday present had created all the confusion because of Natasha's unreasonable assumptions.

**Goynar Baksho, 2013** - Aparna Sen's inter-generational comedy Goynar Baksho (The Jewellery Box) tells the story of Rashmoni (Moushumi Chatterjee)—a matriarch obsessed with her wedding jewels that she keeps sequestered in a box, as the family is forced to move from East Pakistan to India during the Partition. After her husband dies, Rashmoni's main preoccupation is hiding her valuable wedding jewellery from her greedy joint family.

**Jab Harry Met Sejal, 2017** - The plot of Imtiaz Ali's romantic comedy is centered around the engagement ring Sejal (Anushka Sharma) loses on her Europe trip on which Harry (Shah Rukh Khan) is a guide. Sejal enlists Harry's help to find the ring and the story takes off from there.

**Ocean's 8, 2018** - This popular heist comedy franchise's last outing revolved around a plot to steal the Toussaint, an enormous \$150 million necklace named after Cartier's legendary creative director Jeanne Toussaint. A team led by Debbie Ocean (Sandra Bullock) plans to crash the Met Gala which film star Daphne Kluger (played by Anne Hathaway) is expected to attend wearing the Toussaint.

**Padmaavat, 2018** - The contentious piece of jewellery in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's epic period drama is Queen Nagmati's pearl necklace that her husband Maharawal Ratan Singh of Chittor (Shahid Kapoor) allegedly gives away. Nagmati sends Ratan Singh to Sri Lanka to obtain those precious pearls again and that is where he falls in love with Sinhalese princess Padmavati (Deepika Padukone). Padmavati becomes Ratan Singh's second queen and eventually leads the women of Chittor into the controversial jauhar (mass self-immolation). Another allusion to jewellery in the film that dazzles with royal gems comes in the form of Padmavati's powerful dialogue: "*Rajputi kangan mein utni hi taaqat hai jitni Rajputi talwar mein*," which translates to 'Rajput bangles are as strong as Rajput swords.'

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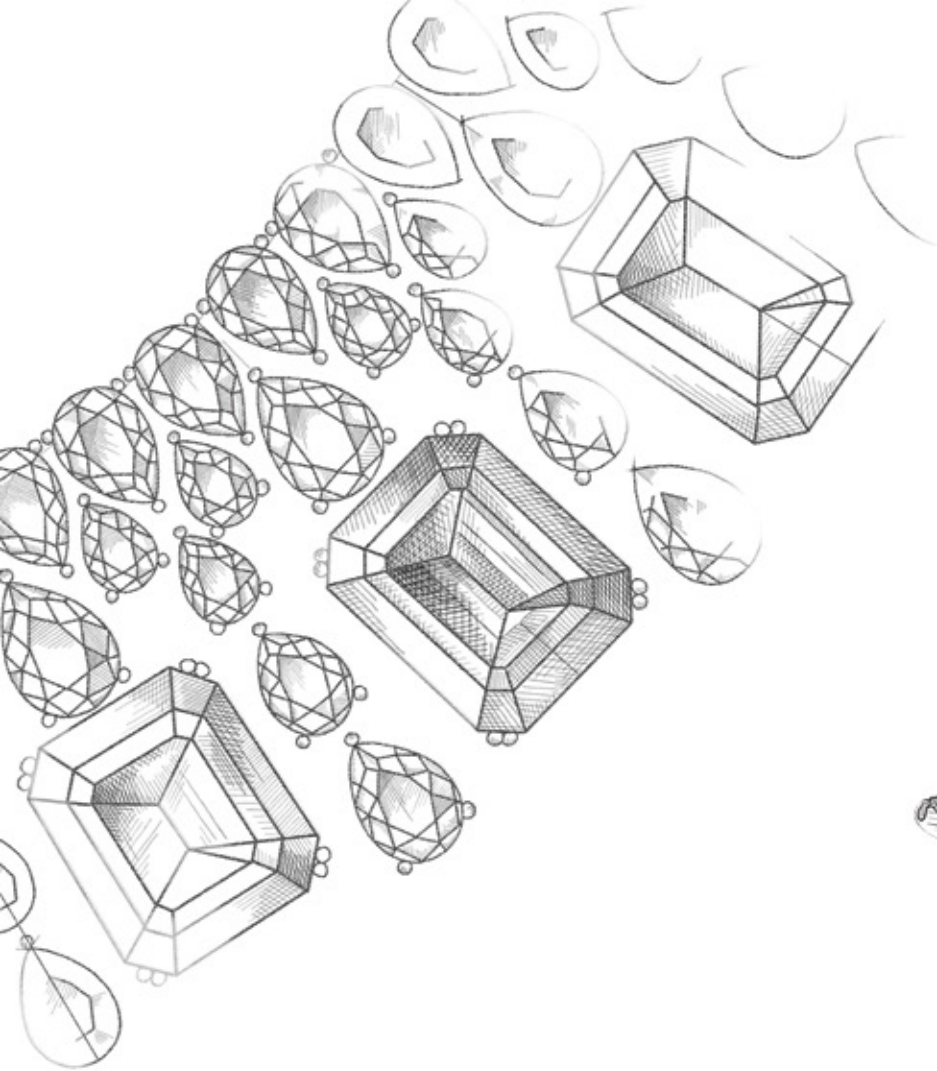
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### ***THE VOICE OF FASHION TEAM***

Shefalee Vasudev  
Sohini Dey  
Snigdha Ahuja  
Suruchi Khubchandani  
Saumya Sinha  
Beenu Arora  
Manpreet Singh  
Yasmin Ranijiwala  
Anusree Nair  
Nandini Garg

### **COVER IMAGE**

Rajiv Purohit  
*Design Head, Nicobar and  
Menswear Designer, Good Earth*  
*Photo by Madhav Mathur*

### **BOOK ART AND DESIGN**

Roshini Dhiri



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*The Voice of Fashion* published by IMG Reliance is India's first digital daily magazine on fashion and design. It tracks, defines and leads fashion conversations in India and about Indian fashion and retail globally.

[www.thevoiceoffashion.com](http://www.thevoiceoffashion.com)



[thevofashion@gmail.com](mailto:thevofashion@gmail.com)